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LITTLE JOURNEYS

To the Homes of GREAT MUSICIANS

Giuseppe Verdi

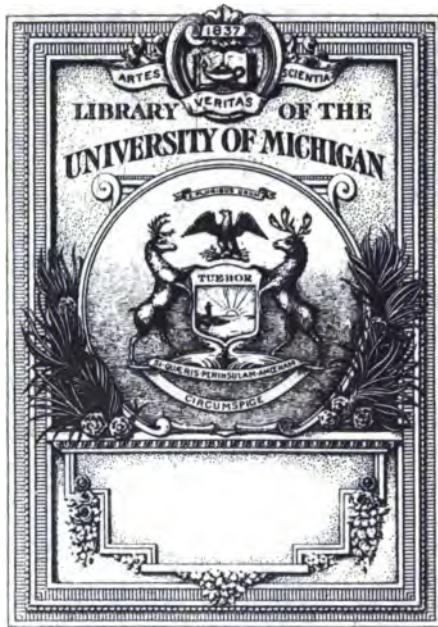
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By ELBERT HUBBARD



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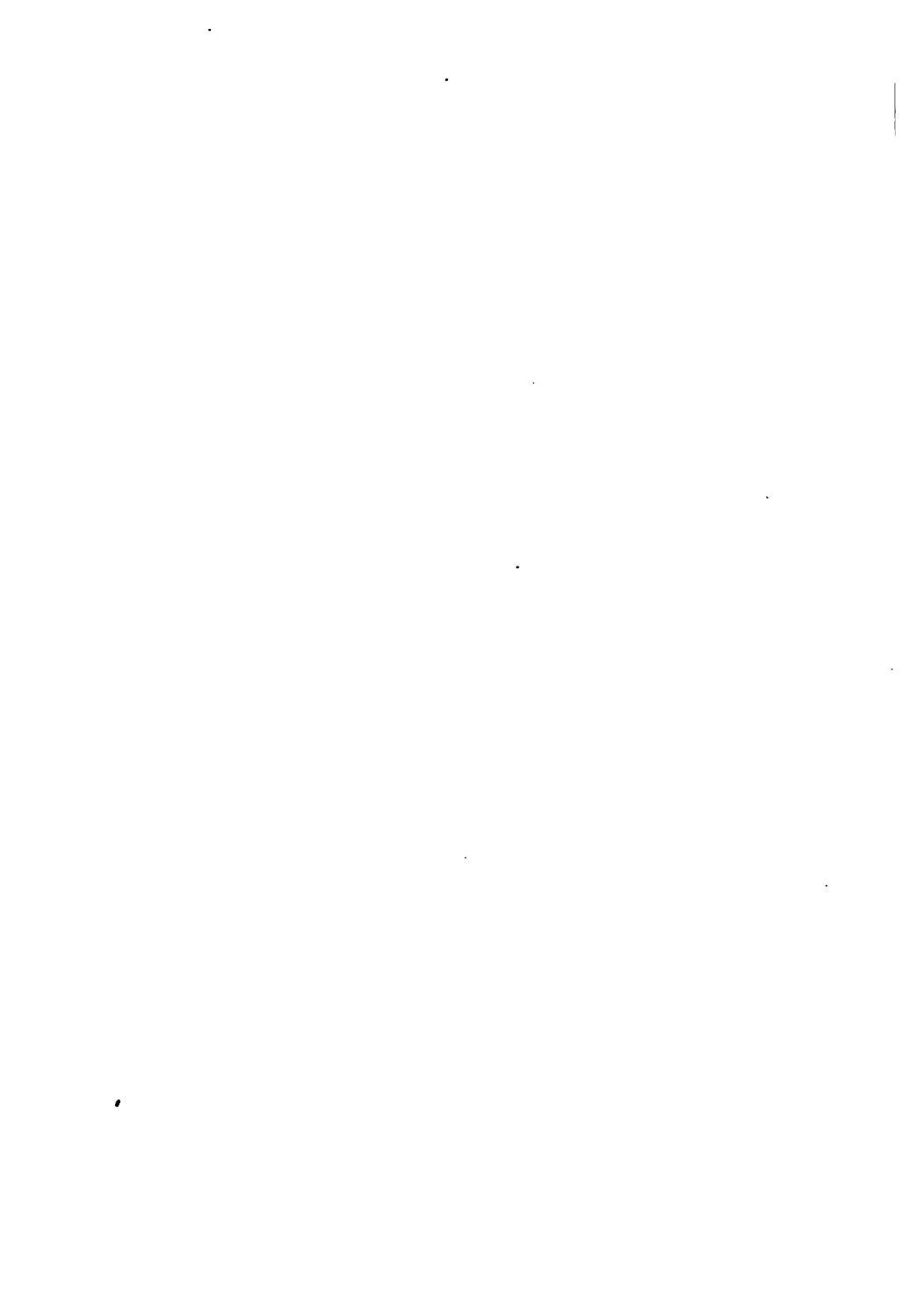
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Verdi





LITTLE ~~~
JOURNEYS
To the Homes of
GREAT ~~~
MUSICIANS
Verdi

Written by Elbert Hubbard and done
into a Book by the
Roycrofters at their
Shop, which is in
East Aurora, New
York, A. D. 1901~~~



Dr. Warren P. Lomax
84-9-1928

4-10-27 Hns

Of all the operas that Verdi wrote,
The best, to my taste, is the Trovatore;
And Mario can soothe, with a tenor note,
The souls in purgatory.

The moon on the tower slept soft as snow;
And who was not thrilled in the strangest way,
As we heard him sing, while the gas burned low,
"Non ti scordar di me"?

* * * * *

But O, the smell of that jasmine flower!
And O, the music! and O, the way
That voice rang out from the donjon tower,
"Non ti scordar di me,
"Non ti scordar di me!"

BULWER-LYTTON.

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GIUSEPPE VERDI





E sort of clung to the iron pickets, did GIUSEPPE the boy, and pressed his thin face through VERDI the fence, and listened. Someone was playing the piano in the big house, and the windows with their little diamond panes were flung open to catch the evening breeze. He listened.

His big grey eyes were open wide, the pupils dilated,—he was trying to see the music as well as hear it.

The boy's hair matched the yellow of his face, being one shade lighter, sun-bleached from going hatless. His clothes were as yellow as the yellow of his face, and shaded off into the dust that strewed the street. He was like a quail in a stubble field—you might have stepped over him and never seen him at all. He listened. Almost every evening someone played the piano in the big house. He had discovered the fact a week before. And now when the dusk was gathering, he would watch his chance and slide away from the hut where his parents lived, and run fast up the hill, and along the shelving roadway to the tall iron fence that marked the residence of Signior Baretti. He would creep along under the stone wall and crouching there, would wait

GIUSEPPE VERDI and listen for the music. Several evenings he had come and waited, and waited, and waited,—and not a note or a voice did he hear.

Once it had rained, and he didn't mind it much, for he expected every moment the music would strike up, you know,—and who cares for cold, or wet, or even hunger, if one can hear good music! The air grew chill and the boy's thread-bare jacket stuck to his bony form like a postage stamp to a letter. Little rivulets of water ran down his hair and streamed off his nose and cheeks.

¶ He waited—he was waiting for the music.

He might have waited until the water dissolved his insignificant cosmos into just plain yellow mud, and then he would have been simply distributed all along the gutter, down to the stream, and down the stream to the river, and down the river to the ocean; and no one would ever have heard of him again.

But Signor Baretti's coachman came along that night, keeping close to the fence under the trees to avoid the wet; and the coachman fell over the boy.

Now, when we fall over anything we always want to kick it,—no matter what it is, be it a cat, dog, stump, stick, stone, or human. The coachman being but clay (undissolved) turned and kicked the boy. Then he seized him by the collar, and accused him of being a thief. The lad acknowledged the indictment, and stammeringly tried to explain that it was only music he was trying to steal; and that it really made no difference because even if one did fill himself full of the

music, there was just as much left for other people, GIUSEPPE
since music was different from most things. VERDI

The thought was not very well expressed, although the idea was all right, but the coachman failed to grasp it. So he tingled the boy's bare legs with the whip he carried, by way of answer, duly cautioning him never to let it occur again, and released the prisoner on parole ~~or~~ ~~or~~

But the boy forgot and came back the next night. He sat on the ground below the wall, intending to keep out of sight; but when the music began he stood up, and now, with face pressed between the pickets, he listened ~~or~~ ~~or~~

The wind sighed softly through the orange trees; the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers; the low of cattle came from across the valley, and on the evening breeze from an open casement rose the strong, vibrant yet tender strains of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. The lad listened.

"Do you like music?" came a voice from behind. The boy awoke with a start, and tried to butt his head through the pickets to escape in that direction. He thought it was the coachman. He turned and saw the kindly face of Signior Baretti himself.

"Do I like music? Me! No, I mean yes, when it is like that!" he exclaimed, beginning his reply with a tremolo and finishing bravura.

"That is my daughter playing; come inside with me." ~~or~~ The hand of the great man reached out, and the

GIUSEPPE urchin clutched at it as if it were something he had
VERDI been looking and longing for.

They walked through the big gates where a stone lion kept guard on each side. The lions never moved. They walked up the steps and entering the parlor, saw a young woman seated at the piano.

"Grazia, dear, here is the little boy we saw the other day—you remember? I thought I would bring him in."

¶ The young woman came forward and touched the lad on his tawny head with one of her beautiful hands—the beautiful hands that had just been playing the Sonata ¶ ¶

"That's right, little boy, we have seen you outside there before, & if I had known you were there tonight, I would have gone out and brought you in; but Papa has done the service for me. Now, you must sit down right over there where I can see you, and I will play for you. But won't you tell us your name?"

¶ "Me?" replied the boy, "why, my name is Giuseppe Verdi—I am ten years old, going on 'leven—you see I like your playing because I play myself, a little!"





OR over a hundred years three-fourths of the population of Italy **GIUSEPPE VERDI** have been on reduced rations. Starvation even yet crouches just around the corner.

In his childhood young Verdi used to wear a bit of rope for a girdle, and when hunger gnawed importunately, he would simply pull his belt one knot tighter, and pray that the ravens would come and treat him as well as they did Elijah. His parents were so poor that the question of education never came to them; but desire has its way, so we find the boy at ten years of age running errands for a grocer with a musical attachment. This grocer, at Busseto, Jasquith by name, hung upon the fringe of art, and made the dire mistake of mixing business with his fad, for he sold his wares to sundry gentlemen who played in bands. This led the good man to moralize at times, and he would say to Giuseppe, who had been promoted from errand boy to clerk, "You can trust a first violin, and a cello usually pays, but never say yes to a trombone or an oboe; and as for a kettledrum, I wouldn't believe one on a stack of Bibles!"

Over the grocer's shop was a little parlor, and in it was a spinet that young Giuseppe had the use of four evenings a week. In his later years Verdi used to tell of this, and once he said that the idea of prohibition and limit should be put on every piano,—then the pupil

GIUSEPPE would make the best of his privileges *"or"* In those days **VERDI** there was a tax on spinets, and I believe that this tax has never been rescinded, for you are taxed if you keep a piano, now, in any part of Italy. Several times the poor grocer's spinet stood in sore peril from the publicans and sinners, but the bailiffs were bought off by Signior Baretti who came to the rescue.

The note of thrift was even then in Verdi's score, for he himself has told how he induced the Baretti household to patronize the honest grocer with musical proclivities *"or"* *"or"*

When he was twelve years old Verdi occasionally played the organ in the village church at Busseto. It will be seen from this that he had courage, and even then possessed a trace of that pride and self-will that was to be first his disadvantage and then his blessing. *"or"* Signior Baretti's attachment to the boy was very great, and we find the youngster was on friendly terms with the family, having free use of their piano, with valuable help and instruction from Signorina Grazia *"or"* *"or"*

When he was seventeen he was easily the first musician in the place, and Busseto had nothing more to offer in way of advantages. He thirsted for a wider career, and cast longing looks out into the great outside world. He had played at Parma, only a few miles away, and the bishop there, after hearing him improvise on the organ, had paid him a doubtful compliment by saying, "Your playing is surely unlike any-

thing ever before heard at Parma." Fair fortune GIUSEPPE smiled when Signior Baretti secured for young Verdi VERDI a free scholarship at the Conservatory of Milan.

The youth went gaily forth, attended by the blessings of the whole village, to claim his honors.

Arriving at the Conservatory, the directors put him through his paces, after the usual custom, to prove his fitness for the honor that had been thrust upon him. He played first upon the piano, and the committee advised together in whispered monotone. Then they asked him to play on the organ, and there was more consultation, with argument punctuated by rolling adjectives and many picturesque gesticulations. Then they asked him to play the piano again. He did so, and the great men retired to deliberate and vote on the issue.

Their decision was that the youth was self-willed, erratic, and that he had some absurd mannerisms and tricks of performance that forbade his ever making a musician. And, therefore, they ruled that his admission to the Conservatory was impossible.

Baretti, who was present with his protege, stormed in wrath, and declared that Verdi was the peer of any of his judges; in fact, was so much beyond them that they could not comprehend him.

This only confirmed the powers in the stand they had taken, and they intimated that a great musician in Busseto was something different in Milan—Signior Baretti had better take his young man home and be

GIUSEPPE content to astonish the villagers with noisy acrobatics,
VERDI There being nothing else to do, the advice was first flouted and then followed. They arrived home, and Grazia and the grocer were informed that the Conservatory at Milan was a delusion & a snare—"a place where pebbles were polished and diamonds dimmed." Shortly after, the townspeople, to show their faith in the home-product, had Verdi duly installed as organist of the village church at a salary equal to forty dollars a year.

Under the spell of this good fortune, Verdi proposed marriage to the daughter of Jasquith, the grocer, his friend and benefactor. Gratitude to the man who had first assisted him, had much to do with the alliance; and in wedding the daughter, Verdi simply complied with what he knew to be the one ardent desire of the father.

The girl was a frail creature, of fine instincts, but her intellect had been starved just as her body had been. Her chief virtue seems to have been that she believed absolutely in the genius of Verdi.

The ambition of Verdi began to show itself. He wrote an opera, and offered it to Marelli, the impresario of La Scala at Milan. The impresario had heard of Verdi, through the fact that he had been black-balled by the Conservatory. This of itself would have been no passport to fame, but the Committee saw fit to defend themselves in the matter by making a public report of the considerations which had moved them to shut the doors

on the young man from Busseto. This gave the subject a weight and prominence that simple admission never would have given. GIUSEPPE VERDI

Marelli, the Major Pond of Milan, saw the expressions "bizarre," "erratic," "unprecedented," and "peculiar," and kept his eye on the young man. And so when the opera was written he pounced upon it, thinking possibly a new star had appeared on the musical horizon. The opera was accepted. Verdi, feverish with hope, moved his scanty effects to Milan, and there with his frail and beautiful girl-wife and their baby boy, lived in a garret just across from the theatre.

Preparations for the performance were going on apace. The night of November 17th, 1839, came, and the play was presented. The critics voted it a failure. Marelli, the manager, saw that it was not strong enough with which to storm the town, and so decided to abandon it. He liked the young composer, though, and admired his work: and inasmuch as he had brought him to Milan, he felt a sort of obligation to help him along. So Verdi was given an order for an opera bouffe. That's it! Opera bouffe!—the people want comedy—they must be amused. Even Verdi's serious work ran dangerously close to farce—bouffe is the thing!

Marelli's hope was infectious. Verdi began work on the new play that was to be presented in the spring. The winter rains began. There was no fire in the garret where the composer and his frail girl-wife lived. They were so proud that they did not let the folks at

GIUSEPPE Busseto know where they were: even Marelli did not
VERDI know their place of abode. Under an assumed name
Verdi got occasional work as underling in one of the
theatres, and also played the piano at a restaurant.
The wages thus earned were a pittance, but he man-
aged to take home soup-bones that the baby-boy sucked
on as though they were nectar.

Another baby was born that winter. The mother was
unattended, save by her husband—no other woman
was near. Verdi managed to bring home scraps of food
by stealth from the restaurant where he played, but it
was not the kind that was needed. There was no
money to buy goat's milk for the new-born babe, and
the famishing mother, ever hopeful, assured the hus-
band it wasn't necessary—that the babe was doing
well. The child grew a-weary of this world before a
month had passed, and slept to wake no more.

But the opera bouffe was taking shape. It was rehearsed
and hummed by husband and wife together. They
went over it all again and again, and struck out and
added to. It was splendid work—subtle, excruciatingly
funny, and possessed a dash and go that would sweep
all carping criticism before it.

Food was still scarce, and there was no fuel even to
cook things; but as there was nothing to cook, it really
made no difference. Spring was coming,—it was cold,
to be sure, but the buds were swelling on the trees in
the park. Verdi had seen them with his own eyes, and
he hastened home to tell his wife—Spring was coming!

The two-year-old boy didn't seem to thrive on soup- GIUSEPPE
bones. The father used to hold him in his arms at night VERDI
to warm the little form against his own body. He
awoke one morning to find the child cold and stiff. The
boy was dead . . .

The mother used to lie abed all day now. She wasn't
ill, she said,—just tired! She never looked so beauti-
ful to her husband. Two bright pink spots marked her
cheeks, and set off the alabaster of her complexion.
Her eyes glowed with such a light as Verdi had never
before seen . . . No, she was not ill, she protested this
again and again. She kept to her bed merely to be
warm; and then if one didn't move around much, less
food was required—don't you see?

Spring had come . . . The opera was being rehearsed.
The title of the play was "Un Giorno di Regno." Ma-
relli said he thought it would be a success; Verdi was
sure of it . . .

The night of presentation came . . . After the first act
Verdi ran across the street, leaped up the stairs, three
steps at a time, and reached the garret. The play was
a success. The worn woman there on her pallet, the
pale moonlight streaming in on her face, knew it would
be. She raised herself on her elbow and tried to call
"Viva Verdi!" But the cough cut her words short.
Verdi kissed her forehead, her hands, her hair, and
hurried back in time to see the curtain ascend on the
second act . . . This act went without either applause
or disapproval . . . Verdi ran home just to say that the

GIUSEPPE audience was a trifle critical, but the play was all right
VERDI —it was a success! He said he would remain at home now, he would not go to hear the third and last act. He would attend his wife until she got well and strong. The play was a success!
She prevailed upon him to leave her, and then come back at the finale and tell her all about it.
He went away ~~as~~
When he returned he stumbled up the stairway and slowly entered the door.
The last act had not been completed—the audience had hissed the players from the stage!
Upon the ashen face of her husband, the stricken woman read all ~~as~~ She tried to smile ~~as~~ She reached out one thin hand on which loosely hung a marriage ring. The hand dropped before he could reach it. The eyes of the woman were closed, but upon the long black lashes glistened two big tears ~~as~~
The spirit was brave,
but the body had
given up the
struggle.





THE calamities that had come **GIUSEPPE** sweeping over Verdi well nigh **VERDI** broke his proud heart. He was only twenty-six, but he had had a taste of life and found it bitter, He lost interest in everything. All musical studies were abandoned, his little excursions into science went by default, and he was quite content to bang the piano in a concert saloon for enough to secure the bare necessities of life. Suicide seemed to present the best method of solving the problem, and the various ways of shuffling off this mortal coil were duly considered. Meanwhile he filled in the time reading trashy novels—anything to forget time and place, and lose self in poppy dreams of nothingness.

Two years of such blankness and blackness followed. He was sure that the desire to create, to be, to do, would never come again,—these were all of the past.

¶ One day on an idle stroll through the park he met Marelli. As they walked along together, Marelli took from his pocket a book, the story of "Nabucco," and handing it to Verdi, asked him to look it over, and see if he thought there was a chance to make an opera out of it.

¶ Verdi responded that he was not in the business of writing operas—he had quit all such follies. He took the volume, however, but neglected to look at it for several days. At last he read the pages. He laid the book down and began to pace the floor. Possibilities

GIUSEPPE of creation were looming large before him—a rush of **VERDI** thought was upon him. His soul was not dead—it had only been lying fallow.

He secured the loan of a piano and set to work. In a month the opera was completed. Marelli hesitated about accepting it—twice he had lost money on Verdi. He finally decided he would put the play on if Verdi would waive all royalties for the first three performances, if it were a success, and then sell the opera outright “at a reasonable price,” if Marelli should chance to want it. The “reasonable price” was assumed to be about a thousand francs—two hundred dollars—pretty good pay for a month’s work.

Verdi took no interest in the production of the piece. He had come to the conclusion that the public was a fickle, foolish thing, and no one could tell what it would applaud or hiss. Then he remembered the blackness of the night when only two years before his other opera was produced ~~as~~ ~~as~~

He made his way to his dingy little room and went to bed ~~as~~ ~~as~~

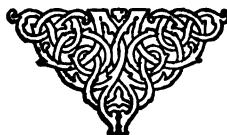
Very early the next morning there was a loud pounding on his door. It was Marelli. “How much for your opera?” asked the impresario, pushing his way into the room ~~as~~

“Thirty thousand francs,” came a voice, loud & clear, out of the bed-clothes.

“Don’t be a fool,” returned Marelli—“why do you ask such a sum!”

"Because you are here at five o'clock in the morning **GIUSEPPE**
—the price will be fifty thousand this afternoon." **VERDI**

Ten minutes of parley followed, and then
Marelli drew his check for twenty
thousand francs, and Verdi gave
his quit-claim, turned over,
and went to sleep.



**GIUSEPPE
VERDI**



THE success of "Nabucco" was complete. Its author had his twenty thousand francs, but Marelli made more than that.

From 1842 to 1851 may be called the first Verdi Period. A dozen successful operas were produced, and simultaneously at Rome, Naples, Venice, Florence, Milan, and

Genoa, Verdi's compositions were being presented. The master was a business man, as well as an artist,—the combination is not so unusual as was long believed—and knew how to get the most for the mintage of his mind. Money fairly flowed his way.

In 1850 Verdi married again. His life now turns into what we may call the Second Verdi Period. After this we shall see no more such curious exhibitions of bad taste as a ballet of forty witches in "Macbeth," capering nimbly to a syncopated melody, with "Lady Macbeth" in a needlessly abbreviated skirt singing a drinking song to an absent lover. In strenuous efforts to avoid coarseness Verdi may occasionally give us soft sentimentality, but the change is for the best.

His mate was a woman of mind as well as heart. She was his intellectual companion, his friend, his wife. For nearly fifty years they lived together. Her dust now lies in the "House of Rest," at Milan, a home for aged artists, founded by Verdi. This "House of Rest" was a Love Offering, dedicated to the woman

who had given him, without stint, of the richness of GIUSEPPE her nature; who had bestowed rest, and peace, and VERDI hope and gentle love. She had no feverish ambitions and petty plans and schemes for secretly corralling pleasure, power, place, attention, or selfish admiration. By giving all, she won all. She devoted herself to this man in whom she had perfect faith, and he had perfect faith in her. She ministered to him. They grew great together. When each was over eighty years of age, Henry James met them at Cremona, at a musical festival in honor of the birthday of Stradivarius. And thus wrote Henry James: "Verdi and his wife were there, admired above all others. And why not? Think of whom they are, and what they stand for—nearly a century of music, and a century of life! The master is tall, straight, proud, commanding. He has a courtly old-time grace of bearing; and he kissed his wife's hand when he took leave of her for an hour's stroll. And

the Madame surely is not old in spirit; she is as sprightly as our own Mrs. John Sherwood, who translated 'Carcasonne' so well that she improved on the original, because in her heart spring fresh and grant every day the flowers of tender, human, God-like sympathy."



**GIUSEPPE
VERDI**



IGOLETTA, produced at Venice in 1851 is founded on Victor Hugo's "Le Roi s'Amuse;" and the music has all the dramatic fire that matches the Hugo plot. Verdi's devotion to Victor Hugo is seen again in the use of "Hernani" for operatic purposes. "Il Trovatore" and "La Traviata" followed "Rigoletta," and these three operas are usually put forward as the Verdi masterpieces. The composer himself regarded them with a favor that may well be pardoned,

since he used to say that he and his wife collaborated in their production—she writing the music and he looking on. The proportion of truth and poetry in this statement is not on record. But the simple fact remains that "Il Trovatore" was always a favorite with Verdi, and even down to his death he would travel long distances to hear it played. A correspondent of the "Musical Courier," writing in 1887 from Paris, says: "Verdi and his wife occupied a box last evening at the Grand Opera House. The piece was 'Il Trovatore,' and many smiles were caused by the sight of the author and his spouse seemingly leading the claque as if they would split their gloves."

The flaming forth of creative genius that produced the "Rigoletta," "Il Trovatore," and "La Traviata," subsided into a placid calm. The serene happiness of Verdi's married life, the fortune that had come to him, and the

consciousness of having won in spite of great obstacles, led to the thought of quiet and well-earned rest. GIUSEPPE VERDI
The master interested himself in politics, and was elected to represent the district of Parma in the Italian Parliament. He proved himself a man of power—practical, self-centered and business-like, and as such served his country well.

The sentiment of the man is shown in his buying the property at Busseto, his old home, which was owned by Signior Baretti. He removed the high picket fence, replacing it with a low stone wall; remodeled the house, and turned the conservatory into a small theatre, where free concerts were often given with the help of the villagers. The adjoining grounds and splendid park were free to the public.

The master's attention to music was now limited to enjoying it. So passed the days.

Ten years of the life of a country gentleman went by, and the Shah of Persia, who had been on a visit to Italy and met Verdi, sent a command for an opera. The plot must be laid in the East, the characters Moorish and the whole to be dedicated to the immortal Son of the Sun,—the Shah.

It is a little doubtful whether the Shah knew that operas are produced only in certain moods, and cannot be done to order as a carpenter builds a fence. But it was the way that Eastern Royalty had of showing its high esteem.

Verdi smiled, and his wife smiled, and they had quite a

GIUSEPPE VERDI merry little time over the matter, calling in the neighbors and friends, and drinking to the health of a real live Shah who knew a great musical genius when he found one. But suddenly the matter began to take form in the master's mind. He set to work, and the result was that "Aida" was completed in a few weeks. The stories often told of the long preparation for composing this opera reveal the fine imagination of the men who write for the newspapers. Verdi seized upon knowledge as a devil-fish absorbs its prey—he learned in the mass ~~of~~ ~~of~~

"Aida" was produced at Cairo in 1871 with a magnificent setting, and the best cast procurable. A new Verdi opera was an event, and critics went from London, Paris, and other capitals to see the performance.

The first thing the knowing ones said was that Verdi was touched with Wagnerism, and that he had studied "Lohengrin" with painstaking care. If Verdi was influenced by Wagner, it was for good; but there was no servile imitation in it. The "Aida" is rich in melody, reveals a fine balance between singers and orchestra, and the "local color" is correct even to the chorus of Congo slaves that were introduced at the Cairo performance ~~of~~ ~~of~~

All agreed that the rest had done the master good, and the correspondents wrote, "We will look anxiously for his next." They thought the stream had started and there would be an overflow.

But they were mistaken. Sixteen years of quiet farm-

ing followed. Verdi was more interested in his flowers than his music, and told Philip Hale, who made a pious pilgrimage to Busseto in 1883, that he loved his horses more than all the prima donnas on earth.

But in 1887 the artistic and music-loving world was surprised and delighted with "Othello." This grand performance made amends for the mangling of Macbeth. Mr. James Huneker says: "The character-drawing in Othello is done with the burin of a master; the plot moves in processional splendor; the musical psychology is subtle and inevitable. At last the genius of Verdi has flowered. The work is consummate and complete" *""*

"Falstaff" came next, written by a greybeard of eighty, as if just to prove that the heart does not grow old. It is the work of an octogenarian who loved life and had seen the world of show and sense from every side. Old men usually moralize and live in the past—not so here. The play flows with a laughing, joyous, rippling quality that disarmed the critics and they apologized for

what they said about Wagnerian motives. There were no sad, solemn, recurring themes in the full ripened fruit of Verdi's genius.

When he died, aged eighty-seven,
the curtain fell on the career of
a great and potent personal-
ity—the one unique sing-
er of the century.

SO HERE ENDETH THE LITTLE JOURNEY TO THE
HOME OF GIUSEPPE VERDI, AS WRITTEN BY ELBERT
HUBBARD, THE TITLE PAGE, INITIALS AND ORNA-
MENTS BEING DESIGNED BY SAMUEL WARNER, AND
THE WHOLE DONE INTO A BOOKLET BY THE ROY-
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